

The Tiger In the Jungle: Identifying Eating Disorders

vol. 4 Eating Disorders in Athletes

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Kalamazoo Eating Disorders Professional Coalition

<http://www.kalamazooeatingdisorders.org/>

Defining and Identifying Eating Disorders in Female Athletes

Special points of interest:

- * Definition
- * Symptoms to Look Out For
- * Preventative Tips
- * Risk Factors
- * Additional Sources: websites, books, videos...
- * Where to Seek Help

Sources for information and help:

- * National Eating Disorders Association:
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org
- * Female Athletic Triad Coalition:
<http://www.femaleathletetriad.org/>

KEDP website for more information and contacts: <http://www.kalamazooeatingdisorders.org/>

FYI: While this newsletter is focusing on female athletes, males are not immune to eating disorders and encounter many of the same pressures to loose weight and/or restrict caloric intake for a sport. NEDA's site states that about 10% of those that end up receiving assistance from mental health professionals are male. The same preventative tips can help deter male athletes from excessive behavior that could result in an eating disorder.

According to the Female Athletic Triad Coalition, the Triad is a syndrome of three conditions that vary in severity:

- 1) energy deficit/disordered eating,
- 2) menstrual disturbance/amenorrhea, and
- 3) bone loss/osteoporosis.

The coalition credits energy deficiency (expending more energy than is consumed) as the primary cause for the Triad. This can lead to disordered eating, such as anorexia or bulimia or subclinical disordered eating behaviors, such as caloric restriction.

Signs to look out for are low energy and irregular or non-existent menstrual cycles. Low bone density, frequent fractures, and signs associated with eating disorders may not appear in the initial stages of the Triad. Since the situation is caused by negative

levels of caloric energy, the result is the same whether the athlete is in this loss of energy from food restriction or excessive exercise (in comparison in caloric intake). However, if the stress in on being lean and restricting food intake, this can result in an excessive focus on appearance with a negative body-image and an eventual eating disorder.

Preventative tips:

- 1) focus on health and positive body image, rather than weight
- 2) provide supportive atmosphere for athletes
- 3) promote eating as an important part of a successful athletic program/performance
- 4) involve health care professionals (i.e. nutritionists, athletic trainers, physicians...)

Risk Factors:

According to FATC, a female athlete in a sport that stresses a lean figure, such as gymnastics and cross country, is at higher risk. Yet there are other factors that add to the total risk factor, such as:

- 1) punitive action for weight gain
- 2) weight checks for the sport
- 3) pressure to win
- 4) controlling parents and/or coaches



Through early detection and quick response time, it is possible to minimize the negative impact.

- 5) excessive exercise (beyond the need for the sport), and
- 6) social isolation due to sporting activity